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Dear Mr. Anderson: An Open Letter To The Danish Storyteller About Craft And Style

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Once upon a time, a child heard a story about a mermaid, about a witch, about a dragon, and dared to dream of what was possible. Perhaps there was a glass slipper, or a daring knight, or deadly curse; perhaps true love saved the day. Regardless, these are all tropes of what can be bound (loosely) to the fairy tale genre. And that is where our journey begins.

Navigating the nuances of what is (and is not) defined as 'fairy tale' was the first hurdle I had to tackle with this project. It seems that most researchers cannot agree on a singular identity for the genre. However, in looking for a place to begin my research, Marina Warner's *Fairy Tale: a very short introduction* from the Oxford University Press Collection proved to be an enlightening start. This fast-paced prelude to the fairy tale format encompasses tales from a plethora of cultures and generations. Choosing to look at the genre as a whole, Warner presents the audience with broad generalizations about the structure and function of the traditional fairy tale form and then picking out specific instances within a variety of different tales where this generalization holds true and expanding on it. Of course, Warner also understands the dangers of allowing such a broad stroke to minimize socio-cultural importance of a specific tale, stating within the first paragraph of Chapter 1: "Fairy tales have a tangled relation to this history, for the stories develop within a complex of fancies, superstitions, and stories about supernatural creatures" (Warner 1).

An established fairy tale oral performer and researcher, Marcia Lane's essay "Defining Fairy Tales" looks deeper into the convoluted definition of fairy tale literature

as argued by experts in the field for several generations. While sharing commonalities with fantasy, legend, and myth, it is important to understand what makes the fairy tale stand apart is its vague sense of past and unquestionable magic with an unclear basis of reality. Lane is quick to point out that the defining differences between the four genres in her personal definition of fairy tale:

> But, and this is crucial, [a fairy tale] is a story that happens in the past and a story that is not tied to any specifics. If it happens "at the beginning of the world", then it is a myth. A story that names a specific "real" person is a legend (even if it contains a magical occurrence). A story that happens in the future is a fantasy. Fairy tales are sometimes spiritual, but never religious. (Lane 40)

Of course, this definition of fairy tale, as well as others, does not specifically deal with the central commonality shared between these four linked genres: enchantment. And while some early researchers may have pointed to the presence of a physical fairy creature as proof of a story being a fairy tale, that no longer stands up to the modern consensus. For example, while the employment of a magical being—or "a sort of 'fairy substitute', if you will"—is repeatedly labeled as the staple component of the genre, it can occur outside of what has previously been defined as a fairy tale (Lane 37). So where do we, as readers and researchers, draw the line? In response, Lane exhibits J.R.R. Tolkien's classic "On Fairy-Stories" as identifying "faërie" the story inhabits as a realm rather than an individual character or entity (Tolkien 4).

"On Fairy-Stories" is regarded by many scholars as a seminal work within the field. Tolkien champions the need for acknowledging the cultural linkage of each tale;

we, as readers and scholars, are told we "must not wholly forget the Cooks" who have contributed to "the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story", at once recognizing the oral and written tradition of the fairytale (Tolkien 7). Fellow Inkling and fantasy novelist C.S. Lewis also utilized his platform in order to further the fairy tale artform. In his essay "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said", Lewis provides a detailed argument behind the literary merits of the genre beyond its generalization as mere children's stories. Lewis is quick to praise the Form of the fairy story for "its brevity, its severe restraints on description, its flexible traditionalism, its inflexible hostility to analysis, digression, reflection and 'gas'" (Lewis 165). Essentially, both Inklings and their works exalt this unique literary format bring validation back into the fairy tale as a craftable story rather than simply a genre for literary critique.

The fairy tale is a genre that has been embedded in our past for generations and have the holding power to remain long after we are gone. Born out of oral tradition across cultures, our most beloved stories have stood the test of time and even evolved in some instances. Focusing solely on European origins, the original collectors of these tales—Grimm brothers, Perreault, Andersen, and others—have created a legacy that twenty-first century critics and writers still admire.

Arriving to the scene in 1835 at the tail end of the fairy tale renaissance in Enlightened Europe (though he had been a prolific writer and storyteller since his writing debut with Youthful Attempts in 1882 and the publication of his first collection of poems in 1827), Danish-born Hans Christian Andersen's tales are timeless stories that have gone through little transformation other the past 150 years (Rossel 16;

Soerensen 167). In his lifetime, Mr. Andersen is credited with publishing 156 unique tales across multiple collections and volumes (H.C. Andersen Centre). Of course, it should be noted that the exact number of tales varies from researcher to researcher and I've seen estimates as high as 212 when factoring in the tales Mr. Andersen wrote for other projects (H.C. Andersen Centre). The timelessness and unique quality of Andersen's storytelling make him an ideal candidate for an intensive look into the craft of his fiction.

By evaluating four of his more recognizable tales—"The Emperor's New Clothes", "The Little Match Girl", "The Snow Queen", and "The Little Mermaid"—for their craft and cultural significance, I will be able to create a template of the Andersen fairytale format. This template and my working knowledge of the context in which these tales were originally told, I intend to create my own original tale in Andersen's style.

When it comes to the end product—my original tale—I must also keep in mind the need for composition integrity. Art is never born in a vacuum, and, as Marina Warner made clear in her book, the fairy tale genre is one borne with extreme ties to context and culture (Warner xxvii). While I cannot replicate Anderson's circumstances, an aspect of my research will be dedicated to better understand where his tales originate so that I may attempt to imitate his structure of writing.

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The epistolary format of my thesis was born out of a need to simply get words on paper. In my previous drafts, I found myself constrained and apprehensive about the

rigid academic structure I had come to expect from a research project of this scale. In my mind, I felt that if I was ever to be recognized and valued for my contributions to the cannon, I had to adhere to what academia had deemed appropriate for broaching topics of crat. I've since lowered my expectations of the scope and impact of this project, but I still found myself staring at a page devoid of meaningfully engaging discourse. In short, I was bored. How could I expect others to appreciate reading my work if I couldn't even stand to write it?

I needed a new perspective—a deconstruction of the formal academic structure I had grown distant from and a reevaluating of whom I wanted my audience to be. In my creative writing, I typically begin with what I call "the Grammy draft", in which I put aside the poetic embellishments and metaphorical language and instead break down a story as if I was explaining it to my Grammy. In this draft, the pressure to seamlessly incorporate elements of craft and meaning into my work drains away; I am simply telling my Grammy about my story. My audience is clear and limited to a single person, but, and possibly more importantly, a person who has a stake in whether my work is successful. For this thesis, I had to put aside my inhibitions of meaningfully contributing to the cannon and instead dictate my research journey to the one person who would value it the most: Mr. Hans Christian Andersen.

There was a certain point in my pre-writing process when I considered leaving "Dear Mr. Andersen" behind, classifying it as merely a thought exercise and return to the more academically rigorous structure I was so used to. However, I was remiss to abandon the newfound liberation I had found in my writing.

For one thing, the words flowed more freely than they had in a considerable amount of time. I was no longer bound by a need to make every single word on the page work for my benefit. I felt at ease admitting my faults, acknowledging the place where my understanding lacked, and asking questions I could not answer. Perhaps this sounds contradictory, but I was genuinely freed by the knowledge that I didn't—couldn't—know everything, and there was nothing wrong with that. My voice is no less important than the researchers that came before me.

Secondly, there is something to be said about deviating from what is customarily considered the traditional structure of a piece of writing. Compositionist Sarah Allen and her book of essays "Beyond Argument" (2015) is the ultimate opposition to the traditional argumentative structure we've come to expect in academia. Allen sees a need for educators to adjust their approach to teaching argument within the writing curriculum (pointing specifically to the five-paragraph essay format) as it stifles its main component: the writer. Instead, she calls for the personal essay to find its way into the classroom as a main component of facilitating written expression. For Allen, the personal essay functions as a space where the journey of the writer transcends any sort of evidence that may (or may not) bolster the argument. It is all about the process of finding an answer rather than the answer itself and "The value of writing in order to test an idea [should] be that such exercises would prove to be more important to "real world" work than even argument is." (Allen 10). In leaving behind the structure I was taught to expect, I believe I have opened myself for the opportunity to surprise myself along the way.

"Dear Mr. Andersen" has proven to be a trying yet enlightening experiment in developing myself as a writer, while also attempting to meaningful analyses of these beloved tales to the pre-established cannon. I am proud of the work I have been able to accomplish despite the plethora of setbacks any attention-deficit college student is bound to face. A special thank you to the friends and family constantly worried about my well-being as I navigated this process—we made it, folks.

Once upon a time, a child heard a story about a mermaid, about a witch, about a dragon, and dared to dream of what was possible. I am so grateful that the child was me.

Chapter 1: Salutations, Mr. Andersen

Dear Mr. Andersen,

Not too long ago I came across a channel on YouTube (entitled simply "The Fairytaler - Hans Christian Andersen") of animated shorts of your stories. In truth these words will likely mean nothing to you, but for me it meant a new way of experiencing the stories I, up until this point, had only focused on reading your tales and not experiencing them. Though the production value and two-dimensional art is nothing to celebrate, the tales themselves remained pure and true to your original telling. In fact, I do believe your likeness has been used to illustrate the main narrator as he tells the stories to two young children inside of a traveling carriage. It was truly an eye-opening revelation (though now it seems obvious) that your stories were not meant to be bound only to a page; they were meant to be shared from lips to ear, from heart to heart.

I know I am getting ahead of myself at this point, so allow me to back up and introduce myself: Hello (or should I say *Hej*?), my name is Alexa and I've spent the past few months diving deep within your history and work, learning all I could in anticipation of sharing my research with peers and advisors (and, by extension, with you). As a publishing student, I was told before I started this project to choose a topic that would allow me to gain a greater perspective into my field of study. I am sure there is a lot to be said about contemporary publishing systems and practices, about what it means to be a gatekeeper to culture and ideas through the written word; but as a writer I found myself bored by the prospect of undertaking such a clinical form of research. And was repeatedly struck by the notion that there was something to be said, even in

the twenty-first century, about the stories that have permeated literate (or even illiterate, due to the oral origins of such stories, but more on this idea to come) society for generations. They are stories we know by heart, short tales seeped in magic and heroism, that we generically label as "fairy tales". I went into my research with my heart set on determining why these stories were so timeless, why they continued to hold so much power in our understanding of the world. Of course, these are not the questions I ultimately answer in this thesis (limitations of time and scope of my project being the enemy here), but they are what started me on this path to you.

"Fairy tale" in and of itself is too broad of a genre (and almost impossible to ascribe to a particular set of circumstances), so my next task was narrowing my vision to a single collection or collector. The Brothers Grimm, responsible for the collection of 210 unique tales of Germanic origin during the seventeenth century, would have been the obvious choice; their work is largely synonymous with the genre (Jack Zipes 2). But I was led to your work in particular, not Grimms', by chance (or perhaps it was providence?) in a small rambling London bookshop one afternoon in July when, on a crowded shelf, I was drawn to a thick collection of 154 of your original tales. It was a paperback reprint of your work, complete with etched illustrations alongside select few of the stories, but the cover was an appealing cacophony of swirling pastels—almost like peacock feathers—and gold embossing on the title. It was beautiful to me, and I took it home for a mere ten quid. In that first night, I read through "The Tinderbox" and "Little Claus and Big Claus" on that first night and from there I was hooked; I knew I needed to pursue your work as the key to my research.

Of course, simply owning a copy of a book is not enough of a reason to start a thesis; I needed an intellectual impetus as well. Thankfully, you made that easy. In getting to understand you and your work more completely, I was struck by the sincere pride you obviously took in your work. Of the 156 tales credited to you, only seven (of which were published in your first volume of tales) are believed to have been borrowed or collected from previous sources, such as the case with the works of Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, Charles Perrault, and Italo Calvino; every other tale is an original creation (Maria Popova 2013). In fairy tale collections, such as those listed before, there is always the ulterior motive to understand something greater than the tales themselves. The Grimm brothers were educated linguists who collected oral stories in order to trace the development of language; Perrault adapted Mother Goose nursery rhymes into the written form, therefore civilizing the peasant tales for bourgeois society; and Calvino sought to combine the approaches of Grimm and Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp (more on him to follow) as a way to advocate for the uniqueness and importance of Italian folktales (Zipes 25; Alison Flood 2016; Calvino xvii).

So why did you write, Mr. Andersen? I've read your autobiography, *The True Story of My Life* (1847), and a variety of other biographical sources, and not once did I see a reference to a driving force other than the need to tell stories. Instead, there was reference to your time days "listening to the old women in the local insane asylum as they spun their yarn and spun their tales to pass the time" (Popova 2013). In learning this, I was struck by the image of a young boy so transfixed by such tales of wonder as told by those whose minds were not wholly based in reality that he allowed it to color his own storytelling decades later.

I do not believe I am alone in my recognition of a childlike sort of wonder in your storytelling—in fact, it's been acknowledged and celebrated over and over by children and adult readers alike. In the early twentieth century, your "literary fairy tales . . . were the very centerpiece of the New York Library's fabled story hours", and Anne Carroll Moore, the head children's librarian at the time, used your work to train librarians in storytelling competence (Leonard S. Marcus, 102). The value of fairy tales is in their adaptability and applicability to a wide range of audiences—and not just children. Tolkien spends a great deal of time in "On Faerie Stories" lamenting the limitation of the genre to the nursery by critics over time (Tolkien 11). Certainly, adaptations such as "The Fairytaler" on YouTube and the Disney franchise have only perpetuated this notion that fairy tales are inherently childish; the children's market is nearly indivisible from the fairy tale genre in contemporary critique. However, if we allow ourselves to take a step back and instead appreciate the tales for their morals and characterization, the adult appeal for such stories once again makes an appearance.

You especially, Mr. Andersen, of what I've seen from the other notable collectors and fairy tale writers, seem to have understood that these tales are not just for children. Though your first two booklets of tales were entitled "Eventyr fortalte for Børn", translating loosely to "Wonderful Stories for Children", your later collections bore no such age classification (M.H. 248). And while your stories are inevitably told to children, they "are certainly not only for children, often balancing on the edge of decorum" (Soerensen 170). Following your death, many acquaintances and friends were quick to point out the unique bond you had to your characters, as if they were an extension of yourself and your world experience.

Is this why you wrote, Mr. Andersen? I'm trying to put the pieces together here, to see the strings that bind together the boy listening to the stories of the institutionalized women to the man devoting his final years and life to the self-expression of such fantastical stories as young woman finding her identity beneath a mattress. But more so than the why behind your work, I'm interested in the how of it all. I want to know how your tales function, how they're able to appeal to both adults and children in terms of appreciation and entertainment.

You see, I believe there is a pattern in your work, a common thread in the craft of your tales. I know there are critics that disagree with such a notion; Soerensen baldly expresses that, despite sharing some themes occasionally, your "fairy tales are discontinuous and inconsistent with one another; as optimistic and harmonious fairy tales are placed alongside others in which harmony is distorted and subverted" (Soerensen 165). And perhaps I would be disheartened by this contradictory notion if it weren't for the work of Russian formalist Vladimir Propp.

In Vladimir Propp's 1928 *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, which is seen by a majority of scholars as the penultimate resource for formulaic typifying of folklore and inspired a number of new researchers to enter the field in the mid twentieth century, "the structure or formal organization of a folkloristic text is described following the chronological order of the linear sequence of elements in the text as reported from an informant" and makes for an intense study into all the many nuanced building blocks of this unique story subgenre (Alan Dundes: Propp xxii). "The original intention," Propp writes in the introduction to his work, "was to present an investigation not only of the

morphological, but also of the logical structure peculiar to the tale" (Propp xxvi). Propp analyzed hundreds of works of Russian folklore, all of which were taken from *Narodnye russkie skazki* (or *Russian Fairy Tales*) by Alexander Afdnas'ev.

Propp's systematic deconstruction of Russian folktales reinvigorated my suspicions that there was a common thread to be found and served as inspiration to formulate my approach to your work. However, I think it important to note that I am approaching your tales with the mindset of a writer and not as a formalist; as such, my research won't be nearly as empirical as Propp's. I also realize my limits. In an ideal analysis, I would examine every single one of your tales to form my conclusion; but time and energy (and sanity) dictated that I narrow down the scope considerably. Instead of a survey of all 154 of your tales bound within the pages of my book, I've chosen four of your most popular tales to guide my investigation into your craft and style. For my thesis, I will be looking specifically at "The Snow Queen", "The Little Mermaid", "The Emperor's New Clothes", and "The Little Match Girl".

I did not come to the inclusion of these four tales arbitrarily; in my preliminary understanding of the tales, I found these tales to be both similar enough to infer finding a pattern but diverse enough to make an interesting analysis. For example, I saw a distinct difference in characterization and format between "The Snow Queen" and "The Little Mermaid", which adhere more to the traditional understanding of 'fairy tale' as a story dealing with magic and enchantment, compared to "The Emperor's New Clothes" and "The Little Match Girl" which are firmly set in the realm of realism. This

juxtaposition of story types makes for an interesting hurdle in this analysis as I grapple with how to illustrate the similarities between two very different types of stories.

Through my analysis, I will evaluate story craft elements such as plot, narration, character, and theme in order to create a working template of your style. At the end of this process, I will take what I have learned from you and your tales to create my own original story based on your style. Again, I am fully aware of the limitations of my approach; as a twenty-first century American woman, I would be foolish to think I can completely replicate your process and mindset when writing my own tale.

So I hope you'll be patient with me, Mr. Andersen. I hope you will see the time and effort I've put into understanding you and your work, and that you will forgive me for any mistakes I might make along the way. I've always admired the timelessness of your tales, even after 150 and so years we are still reveling in the magic mermaids and ice palaces, delighting in the humor of swindling weavers, and mourning the feebleness of life and flames. I only hope that, through my analysis, my original tale is half as impactful as yours have proven to be.

Kindest regards,
Alexa Jones

Chapter 2: Analysis of the Tales

In his unfinished *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1988, 2006), Italo Calvino utilizes his vast knowledge of writing, storytelling, and folklore to illustrate the value of decisive language in literature. His lecture on "Quickness" looks specifically at elements of pacing and structure, explaining at depth that "a story is an operation on duration, an enchantment that affects the flow of time, contracting it or expanding it" (Calvino 41).

The writer must be aware of the pacing of their writing and the time that is spent in narration, that there is a balance that must be achieved. At the same time, the use of the word "enchantment" in this sentence alludes to the idea that there is something larger at play here than just the writer and their effect on the pace of the storytelling.

When it comes to structure, the audience, perhaps consciously or unconsciously, has expectations for certain brands of stories. With a myth or a legend, as Calvino illustrates with a story of Charlemagne, a story in this form moves rather quickly through the various story parts; the plot is driven forward with little backstory because the audience is expected to already understand the lore surrounding Charlemagne. This is true for other plot elements beyond pacing; for example, a Shakespearean comedy is generally known to end with a marriage or betrothal, whereas his tragedies conclude in death.

For my analysis, there are two things I've focused on in order to guide my own writing: structure and content.

Plot and Structure

In evaluating Andersen, specifically "The Emperor's New Clothes" (ENC), "The Little Match Girl" (*MG*), "The Little Mermaid" (*LM*), and "The Snow Queen" (*SQ*), we can look at significant plot points in each tale as anchors for further analysis. Regardless of the content of the story being told, I've found that the beginnings and endings of each tale, as well as inciting incidents and character turning points, function very similarly, creating a structure off of which to work for my own tale.

Therefore, let us begin at the beginning. All four tales begin with a descriptive setting of the scene. In the case of *MG*, *LM*, and *SQ*, the opening paragraph (or paragraphs, depending on the length of the tale as a whole), provide a physical description of the world surrounding our characters. For the little match girl, it's the cold, desolate city streets on the eve of the New Year; Anderson paints a vivid portrait of the underwater kingdom of the "sea people" where the "strangest trees and plants grow" in *LM*; and in the beginning paragraphs of "Story Two" of *SQ*, the start of the character-driven narrative, the close relationship of Gerda and Kay is established through their landscape and physical closeness (Andersen 354, 78, 271). In contrast, the opening scene of *ENC* depicts the eccentric Emperor with a fondness for fashion and hosting council in his wardrobe (101).

So why the difference? It is subtle yet important distinction to make, setting the scene primarily through place or character. Simply put, there is a correlation between the opening images of each tale and what eventually motivates the main character to act.

When a character is driven to seek out a new or different reality because of the physical world around them, Andersen is sure to first orient the audience to that original world. In other words, the initial setting directly juxtaposes the characters' desires and it is the faults of those realities that drive characters to act. In this way, we begin to see why the little match girl goes through all of her matches in pursuit of warmth and love, neither of which she has curled in the corner of that cold alley; why the little mermaid, a princess of the sea kingdom, sacrifices her tail, her family, and her 300 year lifetime for a taste of legs, romance, and life after death. For Gerda, the possibility of a life without Kay is worth leaving behind the comforts and certainties of home in search of her lost friend.

In the case of the Emperor in *ENC*, it is the character's own faulted perception of reality that influences their desires. The opening scene introduces us to the Emperor's vanity, which ultimately foreshadows his prideful reaction to learning the truth about the invisible clothes.

Of course, these faulted realities aren't enough to make a character act on their desires—they need an impetus, an event that forces them outside of their normal order and inspires them to act. This is the inciting incident, without which an active plot cannot begin. A story's exposition, in which a character's typical routine and life is laid out for the audience, is suddenly upended and the character is on a divergent path, so to speak. In these particular tales from Andersen, the inciting incident is often preceded by the phrase "one day", whether in exact words or narrative context.

The Emperor was content with his abundant wardrobe of fine clothes, until "one day two cheats came: they gave themselves out as weavers, and declared they could weave the finest of stuff anyone could imagine… [and it] possessed the wonderful quality that [it] became invisible to anyone who was unfit for the office he held, or was incorrigibly stupid", and the Emperor decides he must have this "stuff" made into a fine suit to test his men's worthiness (101). The little match girl sells her matches on the cruel city streets to earn money for her family, until one day (New Year's Eve, in fact) "she did not dare to go home, for she had sold no matches, and did not bring a farthing of money to her family"; instead of facing a beating by her father, she chooses to spend the night out in the cold (354). The little mermaid, though initially curious about the world beyond the sea, did not have a chance to act on her curiosities, until one day, her fifteenth birthday, she has the opportunity to travel to the surface where, in the midst of a storm, she saves the prince from drowning (82, 84). Gerda and Kay spend the "splendid summer days" reading in the rosebushes when, "while the clock was just striking five in the church tower", that the cursed mirror shard becomes lodged in Kay's eye, thus changing the way he sees the world (273).

Some inciting incidents are more pronounced than others, like in the case of "The Snow Queen"; one minute Kay is a typical little boy, and the next the shard is in his eye. In any case, these tales exhibit a lack of control from the protagonists; the inciting incident is completely outside the realm of their control, they can neither will it to be or avoid it.

Table 1.

	AVERAGE PAGE COUNT	TOTAL LINES	INCITING INCIDENT	
			LINE	PERCENT
ENC	4	143	ln. 9	6%
MG	2	78	ln. 23	29%
LM	21	728	ln. 165	22%
SQ	29	1,010	ln. 117	12%

While we've seen a great deal of similarities within the inciting incident of our tales, the location of the "one day" moment within the narrative is inconsistent, as Table 1 illustrates. Despite having different page counts, my original hypothesis operated under the notion that a template of the plot points of these tales could be broken down into percentages. For example, I sought to prove that opening exposition lasted an average of x percent of the total narrative. However, this did not prove to be the case.

Due to the small sample size of my analysis and the wide range of line and page counts I encountered, I opted to not include a calculated average of these figures; the resulting number was too arbitrary to be considered worthwhile in constructing my own tale.

Whereas the inciting incident is out of a character's hands, the remainder of the plot is driven by the main characters' decisions; in particular, the choices he or she makes to achieve and retain their goals, acting as a turning point for both the character and the story as a whole.

Returning to the discussion of character motivations presupposed in a tale's exposition, it is clear that not all character turning points are equal: it depends on the type of story one is trying to achieve. For Andersen, this goes back to the central conflict. Namely, who or what is the protagonist in conflict with to reach their goals and how do they overcome this opposition. At various points throughout the plot, we see the characters of our four tales be faced with a myriad of decisions that are paramount to story development.

ENC, for instance, is a classic person-vs-self storyline. The emperor, faced with the reality that he cannot see what the supposed weavers have made for him, must make a choice: admit his ineptitude and inability to see the cloth, or go along with the hoax (admittedly, without realizing it) and save face with his counselors (104)? Ultimately, he chooses pride over truth and demands the cheaters sew him a set of clothes out of the fabric. The emperor's two counselors, whom he had sent to inspect the progress of the alleged weavers before viewing the 'cloth' himself, had faced the exact dilemma—and subsequent decision—as their ruler. What's important to note about these interactions is that the emperor's motivations are still at play despite other characters carrying out the objective.

Gerda functions under a person-vs-person plotline in *SQ*. Though the main antagonist is the Snow Queen herself for stealing Kay away from his home and family, Gerda encounters foes in each shorter story that inhabits the tale as a whole. From the old woman in the garden that influences Gerda to forget her purposeful journey and remain with her instead; to the crow that leads her astray, though not out of malice, from pursuing the real Kay; to the robbers that pluck her from her gilded carriage (279, 285, 291). In each case, Gerda must face a new set of circumstances with the goal of rescuing Kay as her cornerstone, driving every decision she makes until she finally arrives at the court of the Snow Queen.

The rest of our focused tales imbue the person-vs-world plotline, in which the protagonists' goals are at odds with the world around them, thus forcing them to act in further pursuit of what they desire. In *LM*, the mermaid gives up her voice—allowing her tongue to be cut out—and her family forever to pursue a life on land, even knowing the incredible pain it will cause her. The sea witch warns her that each step on her new legs "'will be as if you trod upon sharp knives, and as if your blood must flow'" (92). As an audience, we are meant to be shocked by what the mermaid is willing to do to achieve her goal, when she is simply reacting to the world around her; as a mermaid, she cannot survive on land, nor can she live under the sea with legs. The world she inhabits simply isn't compatible with her desires.

For the little match girl, this is particularly noticeable with second match she strikes. In this vision, she encounters her recently deceased grandmother, a source of comfort and love, and cried "'Oh! take me with you!'" (355). In seeing the stark

difference between her current cruel reality in the alley and the loving vision of her grandmother, the young girl has a decision to make. This example especially lends itself to our final plot point: the ending.

The ending is the final decision each character must face, the choice that ultimately decides whether they succeed or fail in their individual missions. In most cases, this functions as a self-sacrifice, with varying degrees of severity and success.

Once again, let us begin by evaluating the emperor's actions in *ENC*, mostly because his is the ending with the least epilogual success for the protagonist. The emperor finally comes to the realization that he is parading himself around the city without any clothes on when a brave child calls out from the crowd, inspiring the rest of the common viewers to voice agreement (105). And though he knows this to be true, he decides "'I must go on with this procession'", sacrificing truth for his own pride (106). Originally motivated by the vain need to showcase a spectacular new set of clothes, he cannot be persuaded to abandon this desire just because the clothes turn out to be nothing more than a falsehood and he is parading in the nude. In the end, this is more humorous for the audience than sobering as the finales in the other tales.

Continuing along the epilogual success, or how well a protagonist achieves their desire through a final sacrifice, we move to the little match girl. As previously mentioned, the little match girl's desires have already led to sacrificial actions in pursuit of love and happiness. When she strikes that second match and sees her grandmother, she wants nothing more than to follow her into this fantasy vision. Now, she chooses to strike all of her remaining matches at once (356). This match has a myriad of meanings,

the least of which being a seeming portal to her greatest desire. It also represents her last chance at warmth in this cold alley (the reason she originally lit that first match) and her livelihood selling them on the street. When she strikes these final matches in pursuit of the dream world she sees in their light, she is essentially striking through her mortal life and instead choosing the afterlife. Her success in achieving her original desire cannot be denied, but it is viewed with grief by the narrator and the townspeople that discover her body the next morning.

LM is the most dramatic of the group of tales in this analysis, in that she sacrifices her life similarly to the little match girl but is actively rewarded for her efforts. On the final night of her contract with the sea witch, the little mermaid accepting of her fate to become sea foam as the prince has married another (98). But when her sisters approach, telling her they have given their hair to the sea witch in order to save their youngest sister from her tragic fate, the little mermaid now has a choice to make.

> 'We have given [our hair] to the witch, so that she might bring you help, so that you may not die tonight. She has given us a knife; here it is – look! how sharp! Before the sun rises you must thrust it in to the heart of the prince, and when the warm blood falls upon your feet they will grow together again into a fishtail, and you will become a mermaid again, and come back to us, and live your three hundred years before you become dead salt sea foam.' (98)

But instead of killing the prince in order to save herself, the little mermaid throws the knife back into the sea before following in its wake, quickly loosing her physical form as the sun rises (99). And for this sacrifice, she is rewarded. Instead of turning to sea

foam, she feels her spirit drawn upwards and forming wings; she has become one of the daughters of the air (99). "'You, poor little mermaid,'" they tell her, '"have striven with your whole heart after the goal we pursue; you have suffered and endured: you have by good works raised yourself to the world of spirits, and can gain an immortal soul after three hundred years'" (100). She had willing given up her desire to gain an immortal soul as a human with a promise of an afterlife but had been equally rewarded by her sacrifices in the end.

In contrast, *SQ*'s ending does not fit with the sacrificial ending theory. While Gerda's journey to reach Kay at the snow palace has been laced with hardships and difficult decisions, the actual retrieval of Kay is anticlimactic. Gerda's warms tears are the catalyst for melting her friend's frozen heart, yet this is done without any obvious or implied sacrifice on Gerda's end (300). Indeed, the pair is able to leave the Snow Queen's palace and return home without additional struggle.

Regardless, this example is in the minority of the sample I investigate in this thesis, and I feel confident moving forward in my theory of sacrificial endings.

Contents

As important as identifying the plot points of an Andersen tale is, it can only take us so far. Meaning, while evaluating and establishing an Andersenian structure for my original tale was necessary, it does not dive into the nuanced internal elements of each tale. Namely, I've identified narration, dialogue, nature, and magic as vital aspects of creating an Andersen inspired tale.

Andersen was known for his presence as an oral storyteller, previous research has for this project has shown. With this in mind, it came as no surprise that the narrator role of these tales was both prominent and unique. The narrator's voice was present in each of the tales and would directly address the audience directly, with a shift to 'you' language in such instances. The most notable instance of this is the "First Story" of SQ, in which the narrator implores the audience to "Look you, now we are about to begin. When we are at the of the story we shall know more than we do now" (270). In less extreme instances, the narrator simply made exclamations or observations about the characters or settings for the audience to acknowledge. In introducing the sea kingdom, the narrator tells the audience "Now you must not believe there is nothing down there but bare sand" (78).

While it is interesting for the narrator to interact with the audience, we must also take into consideration how the narrator interacts with the characters and the tales themselves. All four of the tales I analyzed were written from a third-person perspective, in which our narrator is limited to the thoughts of only one to three characters, as Table 2 illustrates:

Table 2.

	NUMBER OF CHARACTERS	NUMBER OF NARRATED PERSPECTIVES
ENC	8	3
MG	3	1
LM	7	1
SQ	13	2

While there is no correlation between active characters and narrated perspectives, the limited number of narrators, even in heavily populated tales such as *SQ*, means my own tale must be equally limited.

Along this same vein, the narrator in each of these tales exhibits a great deal of psychic distance from the characters. In *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers,* John Gardner defines psychic distance as "the distance the reader feels between himself [or herself] and the events in the story" via the narrator (Gardner 111). In essence, the narrator of these tales deals mostly with the external actions of a character; any internal emotions are expressed superficially and a character's inner most thoughts are articulated as dialogue.

Speaking of dialogue, speaking lines are formatted with only single apostrophes functioning as quotation marks and with past tense speaking tags before the character tag. Similarly to how I approached the percentile break down of the inciting incident in each tale, I also attempted to prove that there was a systemic average to the amount of dialogue in each tale, as Table 3 indicates. Again, however, my original hypothesis was proven incorrect.

Table 3.

	TOTAL LINES	**LINES OF DIALOGUE**	**PERCENTAGE OF DIALOGUE**
ENC	143	50	35%
MG	78	5	6%
LM	728	159	22%
SQ	1,010	366	36%

However, what these percentages lack in consistency they more than make up for in reasoning. What I realized in evaluating these rudimentary statistics is that the amount of dialogue in each tale is directly correlated by the number of characters and narrative perspectives from Table 2. Basically, a protagonist that only interacts with a couple of

other characters, such as the case with *LM*, will have considerably less dialogue than a tale that involves more character interactions and narrative perspectives, such as with *ENC* and *SQ*. So while there is not an exact percentage of dialogue to keep in mind when crafting my own tale, I must also consider how many characters are interacting with each other within the original tale.

In looking at setting now, Andersen definitely prefers nature and natural settings as opposed to urban ones, as showcased in the previous discussion of the opening scenes of each tale. There is also a suggestion of natural settings being linked to the 'happier' endings, for lack of a better word, in this group of tales. Specifically, a protagonist in a natural setting is more apt to be rewarded for their deeds and sacrifice (i.e. *LM* and *SQ*) than a character in an urban environment, such as the emperor or the little match girl. *SQ* in particular utilizes nature as a source of wisdom as well as beauty, such as with the anthropomorphic flowers in the conjurer's garden or the set of crows that aid Gerda continuing her journey.

Finally, one cannot have a discussion about fairy tales without a discussion on the presence of magic; or, in some cases, the apparent lack of magic. In relying once again on Tolkien's definition of fairie stories, magic is an element of this brand of literature that is meant to be inherent and unquestionable, a willing suspension of disbelief by both the characters and the audience (Tolkien 19). Of course, not all magic is made equal, so to speak, and has its place in these tales at varying degrees. On one end of the spectrum there is *LM*, within the realm of mystical creatures; witches, potions and curses; and magical transformation. *SQ* is similarly attired in magic, with the

presence of the Snow Queen, whose power is unknown, and the goblin mirror shards being at once vague and unquestionable.

Moving beyond physical magic now, we entertain how magic and fantasy find their way inside *ENC* and *MG*. While the cheaters' claims about the properties of the woven fabric in *ENC* prove to be false, there is still no doubt from the emperor nor the general public that it is a false claim until the very end of the tale. *MG* on the other hand capitalizes on the magic of a young girl's imagination.

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In this extended analysis of the four tales, there is a lot to be said, but not nearly as many consistencies and structures as I originally set out to prove. I've seen slight trends and I've seen vast differences. But at the root of it all is Andersen. Despite not creating the formal template I believed I would, I do still have a solid foundation on which to base my own tale.

Chapter 3: The Woodcutter and His Lady: An Andersen-Inspired Tale

Deep in the great forest, where the tress grew higher than the tallest houses, taller than giants—can you imagine! —there lived a Woodcutter. Nestled in the emerald green of the dense trees, the Woodcutter spent his days chopping down trees to make firewood to sell to the nearby town.

'What a tragedy,' he often thought, 'that I must mar this beautiful forest in order to live.' So he chose the trees he felled very carefully, searching out trees that were stunted or leaning—he was just making firewood, after all. If you were to stand in the forest and look all around, you likely wouldn't even be able to tell that there were any trees missing, the Woodcutter was so cautious as to not disturb the natural beauty of the forest.

He was a jovial man, the Woodcutter, and liked to whistle while he worked. A tune would slip out from between his lips and twist its way through the forest, keeping time with the quick one, two, three! swings of his ax, over and over until the tree finally fell. But his song ended in the evening time, after all the work had been done for the day, and he found himself in his cabin feeling very much alone. The life of a Woodcutter was a solitary one; he worked from sunup to sundown and only went into to town once a month to deliver firewood to the residents, neither of which allowed him any time to find a wife. Even so, the Woodcutter continued to work diligently in the forest, hoping that one day he would have a life of his own.

One day, in the midst of the fierce summer months, a fine carriage pulled up to the cabin in the woods. Its wheels were tall and thin, not made for the rough travel through the forest like the Woodcutter's cart. From its cushioned interior spilled a stout little man all buttoned up in layers of silk and velvet. He introduced himself as an emissary to the Lord of the manor house in the nearby town.

'My lord has need of need of enough firewood to keep his entire manor house warm for the coming winter months,' said the emissary. 'As you know, my lord normally moves his household to the southern city when the weather turns cold, but this year he has decided to remain in the manor and invite other lords and ladies to reside with him through the winter. He shall need for each fireplace and the kitchen stoves.'

The emissary told the Woodcutter the number of logs he must provide to the manor house before the cold months began—more than he sold to the entire town!—before climbing back inside the gilded carriage and leaving the Woodcutter and the forest behind. The Woodcutter could not decline the manor lord's request, as absurd as it was, and instead set to work clearing the tress to meet the mandate.

The Woodcutter woke before the sunrise and did not rest until it well after it had set. He no longer had the luxury to carefully select which trees to cut down and instead he began to clear the trees closest to his cabin so he didn't have to move them so far. As the forest around his cabin thinned to an unrecognizable field of stumps, the Woodcutter stopped his whistling.

One afternoon in the late summer, the Woodcutter made his way through the empty forest of stumps to the next closest tree. It grew straight and tall, leafy branches reach high into the sky and casting dappled shadows on the ground below—a beautiful tree, one the Woodcutter would never have cut down before, but now had no choice. He hefted his heavy ax over his shoulder and got ready to strike. But just before he could deliver that first thwack! to the base of the tree, a voice called out, 'Wait!' The Woodcutter dropped his ax in surprise and stumbled back, for it was a woman's voice that had called to him.

'Who said that?' he cried, 'Show yourself!'

Then the tree before him began to shake, the branches shivering as if a breeze stirred them, though there was no wind. The Woodcutter watched as the knots on the trunk began to rearrange themselves, twisting and turning until the face of a woman appeared in the bark.

'It is I who spoke, dear Woodcutter,' said the Lady Tree, 'for I do not wish to be chopped down into firewood. I have watched my brothers and sisters fall around me without complaint—they understand they purpose in life. But I am not ready to leave behind my roots just yet. So I ask you to spare me, dear Woodcutter, leave me be and continue to the next tree, he's not likely to give you trouble. And in return I shall give you a gift.'

'What kind of gift?' asked the Woodcutter.

‘Something to help you in your task, for I see how much it tires you. Simply tell me what you need, and I shall help you.’

The Woodcutter picked up his ax where he had dropped it on the ground and examined it. ‘This ax has grown dull and no matter how much I sharpen it, it is taking longer and longer to fell a tree than it used to,’ said the Woodcutter. ‘Could you give me a new ax?’

‘Certainly,’ said the Lady Tree, ‘and it will be better than any ax you’ve ever seen. Simply bury your current ax in my roots and in the morning you’ll have a brand-new ax with which to chop trees.’

The Woodcutter was hesitant to leave his only ax out in the forest, but he did as the Lady Tree said and buried it in her roots. In the morning, he returned to the tree and dug up his ax.

‘But surely this cannot be my ax!’ thought the Woodcutter as he pulled it from the roots. For the ax that emerged from the ground was as light as a feather and the wooden handle seemed to mold to his group. And the blade, he noticed, has sharper than anything he’d ever seen.

‘Oh, thank you, my Lady Tree, for with this ax I can surely chop all the firewood needed for the manor house before the cold sets in. Thank you!’ said the Woodcutter, and the Lady Tree was pleased.

So off the Woodcutter went into the forest once more, armed with his new ax. He once again whistled while he worked, keeping time with the quick one, two, three! swings of his ax. But this time, after the third strike of the ax, the tree wobbled and fell. How amazing! What had taken the previous ax a dozen or so chops to do, this new ax could do in only three solid strikes.

Weeks passed and the Lady Tree was happy to hear the Woodcutter still whistling as he moved deeper into the forest. The next time she saw him, her leaves had begun to take on the vibrant reds and yellows of autumn.

'Hello, my dear Woodcutter!' she called as he approached.

'Hello, my Lady Tree. I have come to ask a favor of you,' said the Woodcutter.

'Anything I can give I shall,' said the Lady Tree, for she had grown rather found of the man since he had spared her.

'The days grow shorter and shorter as each one passes, and I find myself working in the dark most evenings, 'explained the Woodcutter. 'I have a lantern to guide my way through the dark forest, but I burn through the oil so quickly as I work that I cannot keep it lit. If I am not able to work in the dark, I fear I will never finish chopping all the firewood that manor house needs. Will you help me?'

'Certainly,' she said, and she instructed him to bury his lanterning her roots and return in the morning.

‘What will she give me this time?’ the Woodcutter wondered to himself that night as he prepared for bed. ‘Perhaps a lantern that never runs out of oil and cannot be blown out by the wind!’

In the morning, he returned to the tree and dug around in the roots where he had buried the lantern. Nut instead of a new lantern, when the Woodcutter dug away the soil a small ball of light, almost like a miniature sun, rose from the ground and settled just above his shoulder.

‘This orb needs no oil to fuel it, nor will it ever be put out by the wind,’ explained the Lady Tree. ‘It shall follow wherever you go and light you work even late into the night.’

And true to her word, the lighted orb hovered just above the Woodcutter’s shoulder as he worked into the dark nights. During the day, little light rested in the breast pocket of his shirt, keeping him warm as the weather continued to grow colder, and at night it would rise to its position above the Woodcutter just as the real sun was setting. ‘How marvelous!’ he thought and continued his work while whistling.

The winter months came and before the Lady Tree saw her Woodcutter again. He leaves had shriveled and fallen, her branches iced over and thawed, and now new green growth was budding at the tips.

‘Hello, my dear Woodcutter!’ she sang, and her branches shivered as if caught up in a breeze. But the Woodcutter did not look his jovial self. She asked him what was bothering him.

‘My Lady Tree, it is true that without the ax and the light you gave me all those months ago, I would not have been able to complete my task for the lord of the manor, so I thank you. My work is difficult and tiresome and has left me lonely. So I’ve come to you again asking for a gift. Would you please bring me a wife? Someone to share my life with?’ asked the Woodcutter.

‘Certainly,’ said the Lady Tree. ‘Lay yourself down beneath and rest your head on my roots, and in the morning, you will awaken next to your wife.’

So the Woodcutter set about clearing a space to sleep with his ax, removing the scrubby brush and rocks from the ground where he would lay his head. He settled down in the tree’s roots, and he could have sworn the were as soft as any pillow, as comfortable as any bed. As the Woodcutter slept, his fingers and toes began to grow and stretch, burrowing beneath the soil to form delicate roots. Up, up, up went his shoulders, higher than even the little cabin in which he had lived, creating a solid trunk. The hairs on his head spread out in every direction to form a canopy of branches and budding green leaves. And last, what was once skin hardened into thick, dark bark.

The next morning, as the pale dawn sunlight shone weakly through his newfound budding branches, the Woodcutter awoke to the greatest sense of peace he had felt in a long time. ‘Where am I?’ he asked, but he already knew the answer; his voice surprised him, seeming to come up from the rooted ground rather than inside his thick trunk.

‘With me, my dear Woodcutter. I have seen how you love this forest and have tried to care for it. I’ve heard you whistles on the wind. You have done well, dear

Woodcutter, but I could see how tired you were. So now you need work no more, simply live and enjoy the forest you love so much,' the Lady Tree responded.

And the Woodcutter was pleased. Together the two watched the forest grow back up around them, more beautiful than it had ever been before. The Woodcutter and his Lady stood taller than any of the other trees in the forest, growing so close together that their roots braided together below the soil.

Conclusion

Dear Mr. Andersen,

It's taken me the better part of a day to write this final letter to you. I suppose after all I've done to study the craft and style of your famous fairy tales, I am finally at a loss for words. Let the record show that don't often find that to be the case. Regardless, I must take the time to thank you properly, Mr. Andersen. Thank you for showing me that art was never meant to be put in the boxes I so painstaking fought to put them in. After my initial analysis of four of you tales, I was disheartened to find my original hypothesis of an obvious formalized structure to be largely proven wrong, or at least inadequate.

But without this analysis, would I have been able to write something as free-flowing as "The Woodcutter and His Lady"? I'll admit I wrote the original tale before I had officially put my analysis on paper, but after o time of being despondent about my work I was suddenly inspired. (Perhaps that was you, Mr. Andersen, working through me? A preposterous notion, but one I felt I must share nonetheless.)

I created my tale through a mashing of different techniques and themes I had noticed through your work, and it wasn't until after I had finished that I was able to pick it all apart. Essentially, I started with a character and a problem. I chose a male protagonist as a nod to the emperor in "The Emperor's New Clothes", but I set him up in a completely different way. Everything that I had noticed about the natural settings of "The Snow Queen" and "The Little Mermaid" I utilized in building the Woodcutter's

forest. While he was a male protagonist like the emperor, I almost wanted the Woodcutter to be a juxtaposition for the emperor's vanity.

The Lady Tree and her ability to transform with her roots provided to magic of this tale, on par with that of the sea witch in "The Little Mermaid" only gentler and with good intentions. The addition of an anthropomorphic tree, similar to the flowers Gerda encounters in the garden, serve to deepen the hold of magic on the tale.

The Woodcutter's "one day" moment or inciting incident comes as an edict to produce enough firewood to warm the manor house through winter, a demand that is wholly outside the Woodcutter's control to accept or refuse. It completely changes the way he lives his life while also opening him up to seemingly impossible encounters, such as with the Lady Tree.

The ending of the tale is both a sacrifice and a reward. The Woodcutter worked hard to complete his contract for the manor house, but it also meant destroying the forest that he loved. When he lies down in the roots, he already know from experience that he will not wake up as he was when he went to sleep, but he willing makes such a sacrifice if it would mean his happiness.

There is so much more that could be said about my original tale, Mr. Andersen, so much space to consider where I missed the mark and where I hit it on the head. But I am not one for boasting. And, if you've taken the time to read it, I'm sure you have already made note of your presence within my work.

Kindest regards,
Alexa Jones

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